

# The Court Process

## What Is Court Like?

Courts are very traditional. Judges and Magistrates expect people to act, dress, and speak in a way that is respectful to the judicial process. You should follow these guidelines when preparing to attend a court hearing:

- Be on time and check in with the bailiff when you arrive. If you are running late, phone the court to let them know.
- Dress neatly and appropriately. You should not wear flip flops, shorts, torn clothing, clothing with inappropriate pictures or words, short skirts or short dresses, or anything exposing the stomach. Baseball hats or other caps must be removed before entering the courtroom.
- Turn off any electronic devices before entering the courtroom.
- Unless ordered to by the court, you are not required to bring your children with you.



## Do I Need To Hire An Attorney?



The Child Support Enforcement Agency's attorney **does not** represent you. If you wish to hire an attorney, you may. If you are an obligor in a contempt action for child support, you may ask for court-appointed counsel. This is determined by your financial status.

You may also decide to represent yourself in court. If you choose to represent yourself (also known as proceeding **pro se**), you take full responsibility for your case. You will be responsible for handling all filings, fees, meeting all deadlines, and gathering evidence and witnesses for your case. If you decide to proceed pro se, here are some helpful tips:

- **Look up** the local court rules to make sure you are following them. Most can be found on the court's website, or in the clerk's office.
- **Make sure** your filings meet the local standards. Your court may have pro se forms that are available for use. Contact your local clerk's office for information and cost.

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- **Make sure** you serve a copy of your documents on the opposing party and report it to the court.
- **Observe** all deadlines and respond on time to any requests from the court or other attorney.
- **Make sure** any evidence you want to use, or witnesses you want to call, are acceptable for the hearing.

## What Happens During A Court Hearing?

When it is time for your hearing, the court officer will call the case. You will be asked to sit at a table in the courtroom. Everyone stands when the judge or magistrate enters, and the case will begin. You will be instructed when it is your turn to speak and provide information. Each side will be given a chance to speak and ask questions of any witnesses, as well as provide any evidence for consideration. If you are bringing documents to use as evidence, make sure to **bring copies** for the court and other party, too.

Remember to **show respect** for the court and the court process. Do not interrupt or shout in the courtroom. If you disagree with something, you may object to the court.

## Will I Have To Testify?

Depending on the type of case, you may or may not have to provide testimony. If you wish to provide testimony, you will be **sworn in** and asked questions. You will be asked to testify truthfully. If you do not understand a question, ask to have it repeated. If you do not know the answer to a question, say that you do not know.



## When Will I Be Notified Of The Results?

Decisions are not always made right away. A judge or magistrate may issue the decision sometime after the hearing. Decisions will always be made in writing, filed with the clerk's office, and signed by the Judge or Magistrate. Make sure you read the entry when it is issued. You may have the right to object to it if you do not agree with the outcome.



If you and the other party reached an agreement at the hearing, one of you will be ordered to prepare the Agreed Entry and submit for court approval. Make sure to follow the local rules for filing your Entry.

**Contact your child support agency for more information if you have questions.**